

CHANGE IS PAINFUL: VISIBILITY AND TONE OF POLITICAL COMMUNICATION IN SOCIAL MEDIA AND ITS IMPACT ON CHANGE IN VOTING PREFERENCES

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ABSTRACT

Now a day during general elections, citizens changing their party preferences have been increasing in nature. Researcher tries to analyze the factors that ignite the change in voting preferences of voters, while focusing on the visibility and tone of communication that was presented by both political parties and politicians in various social media platforms. Researcher conducted a thorough analysis on an integrative data approach, linking data from analyzing the content in social media to public opinion data. This enabled to investigate the relative impact of political party communication and its influence in change in party preferences. The findings reveal that political campaigns matter, however, especially in case of political party canvassing, visibility and tone of posts that are related to politics in social media has its impact on the likelihood of voters to change their voting preferences in favor of the respective party whose visibility and tone are positive in nature.

KEYWORDS: Party Political Communication, Social Media Campaign, Social Media Effects, Voting Behavior & Voting Preferences

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INTRODUCTION

Voter's changing their party preferences from one election to another has been increasing due to many factors, such phenomenon of changing party preferences termed as electoral volatility (Hobolt, S. B., Spoon, -J.-J., & Tilley, J. (2009), Kramer, G. H. (1970), Lazarsfeld, P. F., Berelson, B., & Gaudet, H.(1948), Pedersen, M.N. (1979), Zaller, J.(2004)). Electoral volatility has been observed across many countries and there is vast literature that is available (Pedersen, M. N. (1979), Dassonneville, R. (2012), Jennings, W., & Wlezien, C. (2016)).

In this connection, it is understood that, vote switching in elections is a long-term process that affects the party preferences formation and evolution (Hobolt, S. B., Spoon, J.J., & Tilley, J. (2009)). However, changing party preferences is also observed as short term, for instance, during electoral season (Jennings, W., & Wlezien, C. (2016)). Voters may report that they were inclined to vote for a particular party, but cast their ballot for a different

party on Election Day. Moreover, voters who are undecided develop party preference during the election campaign. While earlier researches have examined the impact of electoral campaigns on vote choice (Boomgaarden, H., Schmitt-Beck, R., Brandenburg, H., Cunha, C., Hopman, D. N., O'Malley, E., Tworzecki, H. (2016), Dilliplane, S. (2014), Druckman, J. N. (2004), Hillygus, S. D., & Jackman, S. (2003), Kleinnijenhuis, J., Van Hoof, A. M. J., Oegema, D., & de Ridder, J. A. (2007), Lengauer, G., & Johann, D. (2013), Matthews, J.S., & Johnston, R. (2010), Schmitt-Beck, R. (2003)), yet it is largely unknown that, how communication and campaigning that changes in voting preferences.

The research examines the extent to which the political communication in social media influences the change in party preferences of voters during election. As Voter's political perception and attitudes have been shaped by the political information that is available (Lazarsfeld, P. F., Berelson, B., & Gaudet, H. (1948), Lengauer, G., & Johann, D. (2013), Schmitt-Beck, R. (2003), Ladd, J. M. D., & Lenz, G. S. (2009)), It is argued that, information about politicians provide cues for the voters to make decision about casting a vote. And that information has the ability to change voting preferences (Jennings, W., & Wlezien, C. (2016), Gerber, A. S., & Green, D. P. (2000), Green, D. P., & Gerber, A. S. (2015), Karp, J. A., & Banducci, S. A. (2007), David Johann, Katharina Kleinen-von Königslöw, Sylvia Kritzinger & Kathrin Thomas (2017)). Researcher examines the effect of political communication by the political parties in various social media platforms and its impact on change in voting preferences of voters during the election. While the print & electronic media process and present the information about political parties and candidates with varying frequency and tone (Geers, S., & Bos, L. (2017)), party representatives use various media platforms to canvass (Lazarsfeld, P. F., Berelson, B., & Gaudet, H. (1948), Gerber, A. S., & Green, D. P. (2000), Green, D. P., & Gerber, A. S. (2015)). The type of channels used to communicate and the extent to which these are used vary by individual, however, it sounds important to study why voters change their minds (Kritzinger, S., & Johann, D. (2016), Kritzinger, S., Johann, D., Aichholzer, J., Glinitzer, K., Glantschnigg, C., Thomas, K. Zeglovits, E. (2016a)).

1.1. Social Media and Political Party Communication Effects on Change in Voting Preferences

Citizens' ability of political comprehension is potentially linked to the deeper perceptions of political process and its practice ((Kritzinger, S., Johann, D., Aichholzer, J., Glinitzer, K., Glantschnigg, C., Thomas, K., Zeglovits, E. (2016b), Delli Carpini, M. X., & Keeter, S. (1996)) Earlier researches implied that voter's opinion are by large determined by the way in which political data is accumulated, exercised, and projected throughout the elections (Jerit, J., Barabas, J., & Bolsen, T. (2006)) For example, voters with adequate knowledge understand that the expenditure of voting as less and the benefits as high, that result in increase of turnout (Karp, J. A., & Banducci, S. A. (2007)). Subsequently, we can witness the influence of (a) Visibility and tone of political communication that takes place in social media sites and (b) Political communication among social media that change party preferences of voters more in detail.

1.2. Visibility and Tone of Political Communication in Social Media

A higher body of literature implies that reported political communication in media affects voter's political perceptions and behavior (Arcuri, L., Castelli, L., Galdi, S., Zogmaister, C., & Amadori, A. (2008), Iyengar, S., & Kinder, D. R. (1987), Scheufele, D. A. (2000), Scheufele, D. A., & Tewksbury, D. (2007)). The social media gives voters information related to politics, political gatherings, political entrants, and political parties' policies, chiefly during election. But all political parties or candidates do not follow similar techniques of marketing by various social media platforms. Some of the social media posts draw more attention rather than others which is termed as visibility bias, whereas other actions and policies will be criticized severely which is termed as tonality bias. From the earlier researches it is evident that

an increased visibility in the social media improvises the saliency of political information amongst voters and the popularity of politicians with their vote share. This effect should also be found in connection with the change in preferences of voting during an election. Exposing to the political information about a particular political party will enhance voter's knowledge about that particular party. However, it also enhances the accessibility of political party and politician to the voters. There by it triggers the change in preferences of voting. Switching between political parties could rise without any prominent transference in political ideology, where voters have an option to choose between various political parties who offer similar things in same political platforms. Hence "Social media visibility "hypothesis can be developed as

H1a: The higher the perceptibility of a particular party in the social media is the more likely an individual will prefer to support the political party.

The tone used in posting the political news in social media affects voter's party preferences: Voters are more likely to vote for a candidate or party if the political news in social media report favorable to the politicians and political party. According to dual processing theories(Zaller, J. (1992) suggest that the two alternative choices are responsible for such effects, reporting about the politicians or politics in Positive or negative constitute the party itself. Reporting positively about politicians and political party in social media could persuade the voters by highlighting arguments in a convincing manner about a particular candidate or party, particularly when the voters are motivated to process the information systematically. This kind of systematic processing may influence the voters to change their voting preferences due to careful consideration of data given by different parties. Hence formulating the hypothesis on "Tone of political communication in social media".

H1(b): More the positive tone of political communication in social media about a particular party, better will be the individual's change in party's preference.

2. THE CASE

Telangana state in India is an exemplary classic case to study the hypotheses. Telangana is distinguished by various parties, where changes are more likely to happen in party preferences through the electoral campaign, as voters can shift to other party with the same philosophical camp.

3. DATA

Most empirical studies suffer with numerous of methodological issues. Either they draw conclusions from the available data casually or totally devoid of proper social media content. Their conclusions are majorly influenced by social media usage for political purpose. Thus integrative design employed could solve such issues. This design connects to superior public opinion data(Kritzing, S., Johann, D., Aichholzer, J., Glinitzer, K., Glantschnigg, C., Thomas, K., Zeglovits, E. (2016b)) of the social media content that the users of social media consume. During the elections, the dependent variable would be any changes in party preference. The political parties tend to reach out to their supporters; it can be notices that effect on vote choice or turnout do not primarily depend on political parties' communication efforts but from voters' general party preferences. It is established that the impact of canvassing are on voters who either had not reported a party preference in the pre-election survey or had a different party preference. Findings regarding communication effects should therefore be more robust.

4. PUBLIC OPINION DATA

Public choices and attitudes were gathered before and after the election panel survey, with the pre-election survey conducted (N = 1,123). In all 937 respondents participated in the post-election questionnaire. Voter preferences were surveyed between September 4, and December 28, 2018, using online form developed by Zoho. The results have thrown light on the proportion of voters who have developed and changed their party preferences over the communication. It helps us to compare the voter's intention to the voters reported vote choice after completion of elections i.e. December 7, 2018.

5. MEDIA CONTENT DATA

Social media data having posts published in four most relevant social networking platforms (like Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, LinkedIn). (N = 1,123) between September 4, and December 28, 2019. A stipulated content analysis was held on the based on social media reports referring to Telangana political candidates and parties in eight weeks leading up to Election Day. Each of the social media post, evaluations of politicians or parties were coded manually. The results that were obtained was satisfactory in the reliability test for both variables (Visibility: Cronbach $\alpha = .74$; tone: Cronbach $\alpha = .76$, on a random sample of 1,123 political posts).

6. CHANGE IN PREFERENCES OF VOTING

The research analyses the Communication that changes voting preferences. It is identified that all respondents who had not decided which party to support during the pre-election survey, reported that they voted for a political party on Election Day and those who had informed vote intention in the pre-election survey were different from their final vote choice in the post-election survey. Later it was determined that these voters' final political party preferences by glancing the traditional vote choice question of post-election survey. The four biggest parties represented in assembly election were considered: Telangana Rashtra Samiti, Indian National Congress, Telugu Desam Party, Bhartiya Janata Party as there was little presence of other political parties in social media, other parties were excluded them from the analyses.

7. VISIBILITY AND TONE OF POLITICAL COMMUNICATION IN SOCIAL MEDIA

To measure social media effects it's been looked at both visibility and tone of the information that was aired in social media reporting about political parties. Visibility was concluded by counting the evaluations for every party and media outlet in a day and weighing them as the party with the most evaluations on a given day (Relative Media Visibility, Table 1). A 3-point scale was used to capture the tone of the actors' evaluations (-1 = negative, 0 = neutral, $+1$ = positive). The evaluations were averaged for every day and then analyzed by the overall tone of the posts indifferent social media platforms on that day across the parties (Relative Media Tone, Table 2).

Thus calculating the Media Visibility Index (MVI) for every party and respondent by weighing the visibility of a party for a platform by the individual's weekly use of the particular social media platform. These values were then combined for all four social media platforms. Lower values of the MVI indicate that the respondent was not or only rarely exposed to coverage about a particular party; higher values of the MVI imply that the respondent was frequently exposed to coverage about a particular party. However, Researcher calculated the Media Tone Index (MTI) for every party and its respondent by weighting the tone of each platform for corresponding party by the individual's weekly media use of the particular platform and by blending these values for all four social media platforms. Lower values of the MTI imply that respondents were predominantly exposed to a negative tone about a specific party in their social media platform; whereas

higher values suggest that they were exposed to a more positive tone.

Table 1: Average Relative Media Visibility in Social Media Platforms

	Facebook	Twitter	Youtube	LinkedIn	Total
Telangana Rastra Samithi	0.1	0.09	0.13	0.13	0.45
Indian National Congress	0.08	0.09	0.12	0.12	0.41
Telugu Desam Party	0.04	0.06	0.05	0.07	0.22
Bharatiya Janata Party	0.03	0.05	0.06	0.05	0.19
N	235	189	572	127	1123

Note. *Relative Media Visibility (RMV): Count of political posts of a party in a specific social media platform (for each day), weighted by the party with the highest number of posts (for that day). RMV takes values between 0 and 1, with 1 denoting the party with the highest visibility in all platforms.*

Table 2: Average Relative Media Tone in Social Media Platforms

	Facebook	Twitter	Youtube	LinkedIn	Total
Telangana Rastra Samithi	.23	.23	-.14	.13	.45
Indian National Congress	-.24	-.13	.22	-.13	-.28
Telugu Desam Party	-.07	-.24	-.18	-.12	-.61
Bharatiya Janata Party	.00	-.19	-.14	.00	-.33
N	235	189	572	127	1123

Note. *Relative Media Tone (RMT): Average evaluation of a party in a specific social media platform (for each day), weighted by the overall tone of the social media platform. RMT takes values between -1 and +1, with +1 denoting the party with only positive tone.*

8. RESULTS

Researcher presents the results in a descriptive manner. Voters showed a significant and volatile electoral behavior during the electoral campaign. Approximately 31% of voters have outlined that they happened to develop or change their party preferences through the electoral campaign which is a significant proportion. The TRS benefitted most from social media campaigning that impacted the change in voting preferences, drawing roughly 51% of voters, followed by the INC (23%) and the TDP (19%). Whereas BJP was least successful, with only 7% of voters changing their party preferences towards this party. Perceptibility of political parties in each of the social media platforms differs everyday from, the different social media platforms built similar attention to four political parties across the time period of analysis. Looking at the average Relative Media Visibility (RMV) in Table 1, the political communication through posting posts in social media most frequently attended to the TRS in all four media platforms(RMV: .45), closely followed by the national party INC (RMV: .41). In spite of being the alliance party, the TDP (RMV: .22) was more visible than the national party BJP (RMV: .19) in most social media platforms.

It is evident from the Table 2 the average Relative Media Tone (RMT) as reported as, the TRS(RMT: .45) is the party that was most favored by the voters in social media, and most criticized by TDP(RMT: -.61) may be for its collation with other parties and its sentiment, followed by the BJP (RMT: -.33) however, INC which was criticized least similar to TDP and BJP (RMT: -.28) and the However, the tone of posts in social media platforms has similarity to that of visibility of posts in the respective platforms. Depending on the individual politicians image that was portrayed in the social media by means of posts that was shared and made public, respondents could be vulnerable to different evaluations. For instance, frequent users of YouTube and Twitter were exposed to rather negative evaluations of the BJP (RMT Youtube: -.14; RMT Twitter: -.19). In comparison, viewers of the Facebook would observe the most friendly coverage towards BJP (RMT: .00).

From the Table 3 it is observed that regular awareness to a particular party and their posts in various social media platforms correlate with voters' shifting their voting preferences in favor of a party during the election. Results from the study indicate that we may have to accept hypothesis H1(a) The more perceptible a party in the social media is the better an individual is exposed to, the more likely the individual will change his or her preference in favor of that party. It is observed from the TABLE 3, the tone of political communication either positive or negative in social media has shown its impact on vote changing preferences. While the impact of social media platforms stays stable and notably significant, we are enabled to notice a notably significant impact on the tone of political communication through social media, neither for quality nor for its genuinity of the posts. These results imply that we may have to accept H1(b) i.e. The more positive the tone of political communication in social media about a particular party, the more susceptible an individual is to change his or her party preference in favor of the same.

Table 3: Alternative Specific Conditional Model Predicting Vote Switching

Main Effects	Vote Switch	Social Media Platforms			
		Facebook	Twitter	Youtube	LinkedIn
Visibility: Quality of the Communication	0.011*	0.032*	0.024*	0.018*	0.04*
Visibility: Genuinity of the Communication	0.014*	0.47	0.46	0.33	0.45
Tone: Quality of the communication	0.062*	0.62**	0.62**	0.88*	0.66*
Tone: Genuinity of the Communication	0.067*	0.17	0.12	0.16	0.12
N		1648	1012	1648	636
LL		-505.04	-286.63	-467.9	-146.29
Chi ²		72.98	90.48	96.59	88.33

Looking at TABLE 3, the results indicate that political posts visibility has a stronger impact on changes in voting preferences, where as quality and genuinity of the posts that involved in canvassing seems to bring in the changes in voting preferences of voters. However, researcher distinguishes the impact of the tone of the communication in social media displaying high levels of change in voting preferences. It has been observed that there is a positive and notably significant coefficient supporting H1 (a) and H1 (b) for the quality and tone of posts in social media. Both coefficients are positive and statistically significant. The influence of political communication in social media on the voter preferences seems to be seems to be stronger.

9. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Researcher in his research explored the effect of political party communication in social media platforms on change in voting preferences. Researcher examined if the voters' party preferences are volatile and how far they are affected by voter's individual perceptions about visibility and tone of the posts through which party or politician communicates during electoral campaigns.

The results revealed significant findings. From the factual observation it is proved that political party events matter and in particular citizens that are regularly engaged by political party posts in social media platforms to be likely to change the voting preferences in support of that party.

Media visibility, both in terms of quality and genuinity of the visibility and tone of the posts or communication in various social media platforms tend to affect voters who are firm in their party preferences, the tone of communication in social media tends to have the potential to convert voters who are undecided yet.

Scope for further research is to completely analyse the effect of campaigns during elections on voters, which are resourceful to incorporate supplemental data on political party communication. it is very important to observe the context of the campaigning and a particular campaign strategy by the political parties, their budgets, policies and their lawful regulations ^{[34][19]}. Further, it would be involving to focus and resolve other serious drawbacks that were relevant in political communication during electoral campaign that have the capacity to motivate voters. It can be concluded that political communication through social media has become critically important with rising number of strained, doubtful voters and late deciders.

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